

Natural Resource News in South Carolina

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Three South Carolina Watersheds Included in Historic Expansion of National Conservation Security Program (CSP)

Columbia, SC, Nov. 5, 2004—**Three South Carolina watersheds were among more than 200 across the nation invited to participate in a historic new program designed to reward farmers for long-term stewardship.** U. S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman announced the selected watersheds recently and said that sign-ups for the 2005 Conservation Security Program (CSP) would begin this winter.

In 2005, producers in the Black, Lynches, and South Fork Edisto River watersheds will be invited to apply. These watershed areas include parts of 16 counties including: Edgefield, Aiken, Saluda, Barnwell, Bamberg, Orangeburg, Lancaster, Chesterfield, Kershaw, Darlington, Lee, Sumter, Florence, Clarendon, Williamsburg, and Georgetown. Total acreage included in the designated watershed areas is over 2.7 million.

CSP, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, was introduced last summer in 18 watersheds nationwide. In this first opportunity for farmers from each state to participate, about one eighth of the Nation's eligible farmers will be given the chance to apply each year over an eight-year period.

Eligible participants will be enrolled in one of three tiers in the program, depending on the extent of the conservation treatment in place on their farm or ranch. Payments will be based in part on this existing conservation treatment as well as their willingness to undertake additional environmental enhancements.

"As an agency and as a state we have helped farmers fix conservation problems such as soil erosion or water conservation since the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s," said Walter W. Douglas, State Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) overseeing CSP. "This, however, represents a whole new direction in conservation and agricultural policy and programs. These payments for demonstrable long-term stewardship will reward many of those who undertook conservation on their own initiative and who care for the resources we all share."

CSP is designed to reward the best conservationists and motivate the rest. The voluntary program provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, and plant and animal life on Tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, improved pasture, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation.

NRCS will offer local workshops in the selected watersheds to more fully explain the program to interested potential participants.

CSP will continue to be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows. For more information on CSP and other NRCS programs see <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>.